AUTHORS WHO ARE POPULAR IN DIVERSIFIED FIELDS

MR. CHAMBERS DISCLAIMS WRITING "SOCIETY NOVELS"

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS is a pleasant gentleman, but he doesn't know the first principles of being interviewed. This may sound strange, written of the man of whom so much has been written, but so it is. He hasn't a single useful pose, not even the pose of not having any.

And so while interviewing Mr. Chambers is rather a heartbreaking job for the reporter, with his mind's eye focused on the pages of white paper that must be filled with what the author said or thought or thinks about this and that, it is something of a relief to meet a man who has no doctrine of art to preach, no cure all for human or literary ills, and no "message" for a more or less waiting world.

When THE SUN man was detailed to interview Mr. Chambers he consulted with the author's publishers, Appleton & Co., and they promised to capture and hold the prey until the reporter arrived. The hour set was 9:30 A. M., which broke records for an early start, so far as the reporter's experience was concerned. The representative of Appleton & Co., explained that Mr. Chambers "keeps business hours," and that he wanted to be interviewed and have it over before getting down to the day's grind. Apparently Mr. Chambers has been persuaded that interviews are necessary evils, and plans for them when his publishers insist much as one would plan for a session with the dentist.

So for a time the talk was of anything except the writing of novels. Mr. Chambers was interested in the letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield, which THE SUN had recently published. He spoke of the picture of Victorian women limned in the letters, and of how similar in type all the women of that time seemed to be. The letters, he thought, told a fine human story of self-control. He wondered what sort of a man the Rev. Brookfield could have been, but most of all he wondered how Thackeray found time to write so many letters.

"I don't see how the writing men of that day managed so much correspondence," he said. "No one to-day seems able to do it."

From Thackeray Mr. Chambers switched the talk to present day happenings. Richard Croker's letter saying that Murphy was Tammany's old man of the sea had just been made public. Mr. Chambers marvelled at the hold that the former leader, separated by time and distance from his leadership, still kept on his followers. He decided that it was the man's fighting qualities, a thing which he seemed to hold very high. Roosevelt and Whitman had it, he thought, and he wondered if the Democrats of the State would be able to find a fighting leader.

A young man in the outer office of the publishing company had whispered to THE SUN man that it might be a good idea to get Mr. Chambers to talk of the society novel and of recent fads and fancies of society, "the tango and all that, you know."

So the reporter tried it. Mr. Chambers looked a little bored. "Society novels? I don't know much about them," he said. "I haven't time to read them. What ones do you mean?"

THE SUN man tried as delicately as might be to intimate to Mr. Chambers that it was Mr. Chambers's own recent writings which he had in mind. But Mr. Chambers wouldn't have it that way. He doesn't—take it from him—write "society novels." And as for the dance craze he said it didn't interest him at all. It might form an incident in a story—why not?—but it was a passing fancy. "When you read history," said Mr. Chambers, "you find that all peoples in all times were seized and obsessed with fashions and manias. There seems to be no reason for them, but they come and go."

And that was all that came of the kindly suggestion of the young man in Appleton & Co.'s outer office.

If anything that has been written conveys the idea that Mr. Chambers is a flippant person or that he doesn't regard his work with a certain seriousness it's all wrong. He does regard his work seriously as does any other workman who depends upon the labor of his hands for his daily bread, but he isn't solemn about it.

Concerning later day fads and fancies suggested by the question about society novels and taking oneself seriously Mr. Chambers says:

"Life as it develops is interesting of course in any phase since man develops with it. But the man who writes about it must have a sense of proportion and a sense of humor. The moment he begins to take himself solemnly he's done for."

Some bromidic imp prompts a question concerning Mr. Chambers's plans for the future. Perhaps he will announce a series of novels embalming the life of to-day for future generations. Wrong again.

Mr. Chambers has no plans. "Long ago," he says, "I planned a fourth in a series of Indian stories I have written, and what is more I put my thought into print or allowed it to be published. Then, of course, I didn't feel at all like writing that story. People wrote to me reminding me about it and then recently I wrote it. It was a rotten story anyway, and I'm sorry for my publishers."

Mr. Chambers seemed genuinely surprised and rather pleased when his interviewer said that he had enjoyed the story of "Cardigan" and its successors in what Mr. Chambers calls his "Indian stories" very much indeed. He won't confess that he liked the stories, he won't admit that he liked anything he ever wrote after it was written, but his face lighted up when he was questioned about how he came to write of *Cardigan* and his kind.

"I lived on the old frontier as a boy," he says. "My people established it. From the time I was a boy I've listened to the local history of our neighborhood around Broadalbin, Fulton county, and picked up arrow heads there. It seemed to me that the stories needed to round them out an account of the expedition that went through the Indian country, and so I wrote it."

Mr. Chambers is reminded that since "Cardigan," published in 1901, he has become, in the popular mind at least, the foremost exponent of the art of producing "best sellers." Then come the questions about the "happy ending" and "giving the public what it wants."

He doesn't get angry, but he says quite seriously that he doesn't try to write "best sellers" and that he never tried to write a "popular novel" but once.

"No one can tell what the 'popular demand' is," he says. "The publishers think they know sometimes, but do they? If you attempt to conform to what you believe to be the popular demand that's the beginning of your downfall. You can't fulfil any imaginary demand.

"Mind you, I don't mean to say that I'd be above trying for it if I knew how. I did try just once to write a popular book. It was a great failure."

But this doesn't mean that Mr. Chambers doesn't work hard at his job of story telling. He confesses to an everlasting dissatisfaction with all he writes.

"Perhaps next year I could do it all better," he says. "But if I waited until I was satisfied I would have to go on forever tearing up what I have written, and then I couldn't make a living. If you stick to a book as long as you can better it that's the best you can do."

He disclaims all responsibility for the "happy ending," saying that in his books and short stories things happen as they do because it seems natural. "Catastrophes are rather rare in real life, don't you think?" he questions. "There are vast numbers of people who have no great happenings in their lives."

And he adds that the best a writer can do is to try to satisfy himself that his work rings true. This reminds Mr. Chambers that "my critics find many things in my books that I never thought of." But he says it goodhumoredly. Next moment Mr. Chambers is denying that he is a realist and is saying:

"I'm not certain but that imaginative work is just as valuable as the realistic," and then, for Mr. Chambers is never dictatorial and to interview him is to be interviewed, comes the inevitable:

"What do you think?"

The discussion of this leads on to other topics and finally to Mr. Chambers's creed of art, so far as he seems to have one:

"If you have a good time in writing a book," he says, "the chances are that others will enjoy it too. My rule is to have the best time I can. The penalty is that when the work is finished you can't enjoy it. At least I can't. I could not read a book that I have written after I have corrected the page proofs. You see you can never forget the labor of it. You can never see anything but the machinery, all the problems you've met and some that you've left unsolved.

"Always to me my work looks amateurish when it's done. After it is in print I begin to see the faults and I can't read it."

He is very serious when talking about this side of the writer's work, and his interviewer recalls that Mr. Chambers once said that he was a slow and painstaking workman and that for every 120,000 or 140,000 words that saw print he had written at least 300,000.

He says that hard work is common to the writers of the day, since whatever other faults there may be "technically good work is now the rule rather than the exception." He adds that while his great desire is for "good workmanship" he doesn't like to see the technique sticking out. "The best, as every one knows, hides itself," he says.

Mr. Chambers has said that he has just finished a series of short stories, "frivolous things," he calls them. It's a bit hard to tell why, for presently he is speaking of the difficulty of the technique of the short story. "It's like the etcher's work; you can't make a mistake in the plate," he says, "and you must be careful to avoid faults that would be overlooked and forgotten in the novel."

Of his own methods of work Mr. Chambers says that they consist simply of keeping at it. He goes to his "office" every day, sits down and does what he can. "Sometimes I accomplish something and sometimes I don't," he says, "but I am always there and trying to write."

To the meagre information as to Mr. Chambers's writing habits his publishers add that Mr. Chambers keeps "regular hours," meaning, they explain, that he goes to work and quits work quite as though he were dealing in stocks and bonds instead of words. He may be going along under a full head of steam, but he doesn't allow his inspiration—Mr. Chambers wouldn't call it that—to keep him at work late at night. When it's a day he calls it a day and quits until "office hours" to-morrow.

The subject of plots and how to find them comes up.

"Plots! Good Lord!" he ejaculates. "If I had twenty heads and as many hands I couldn't use all the plots that are handy. I don't bother with plots."

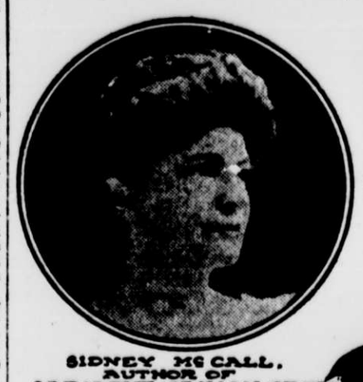
Evidently if you are a Chambers you find yourself an island author in a sea of plots, and as for characters to go with 'em, why, he says, drawing on his experience as an artist—he first exhibited in that Salon of 1889—for his figure:

"The artist has dozens of different models, doesn't he? They pose for him, but are merely the framework from which he makes his picture. A study is merely a study, a picture a picture; the one is merely an exercise, the other something larger. I have my models and I try to follow them out logically. I disguise them; naturally I don't want libel suits. I might take you, for instance, and try to make up my mind about you. I wouldn't always those ready to do it and apparently those came to listen. Personally I have no desire to preach and very little patience to listen to preaching."

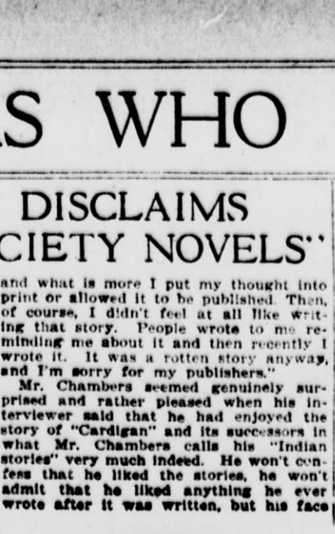
They don't talk much nowadays about "the great American novel," but the subject comes up and is dismissed with a contemptuous wave of the monocle which Mr. Chambers has stuck into his right eye to study a pen and pencil sketch he has been making. He apparently believes there "ain't no sich an animile" and never will be in the sense in which it used to be talked of. He is also impatient with the theory that "there ought to be some one to do for New York what Dickens did for London." "Who would read it if it was done?" he asks, and adds, "Why should we want to go back anyway?" The newspapers, he suggests, are picturing New York life in a way to fill all wants.

Mr. Chambers has inked his fingers while working on his sketch and he voices his opinion of the pen to a man who comes in to inquire how the interview is progressing. During apologies for the misbehaving pen and expressions of Mr. Chambers's publishers' wish that he would illustrate his own work the fact comes to light that the man who often turns out two novels a year does all his writing in long hand. "No, not with a pen," he says, eying ruefully his ink stained fingers; "I work with a pencil."

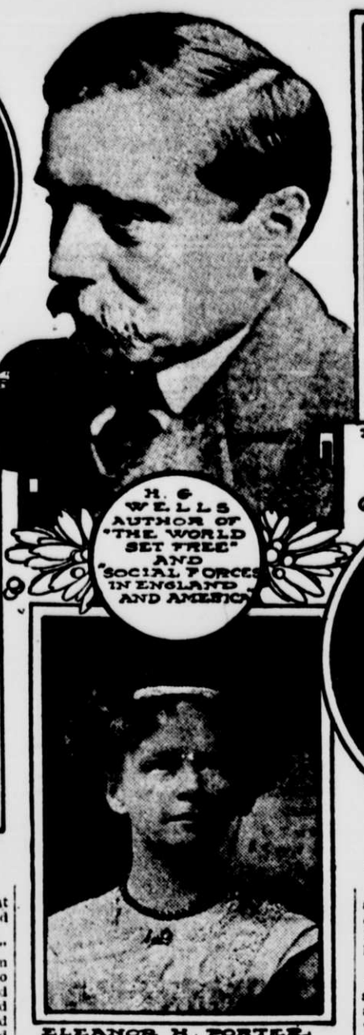
"And," puts in the publishers' office man as the interview ends, "you are subject to writer's cramp." He says it reprovingly and looks indignantly at the author's fingers as one might at a precious dollar producing machine that sometimes gets out of order.



SIDNEY McCALL,
AUTHOR OF
"ARIADNE OF ALLAN WATER"
(LITTLE, BROWN & CO.)

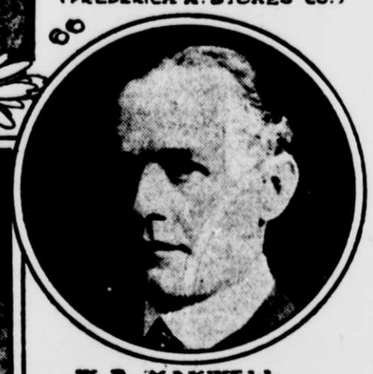


GILBERT CANNAN
AUTHOR OF
"OLD MOLE"
(D. APPLETON & CO.)



H. G. WELLS
AUTHOR OF
"THE WORLD SET FREE"
AND
"SOCIAL FORCES IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA"

NARAVENE THOMPSON
AUTHOR OF
"THE WOMAN'S LAW"
(FREDERICK A. STOKES CO.)



W. B. MAXWELL
AUTHOR OF
"THE DEVIL'S GARDEN"
(BOBBS-MERRILL CO.)

ELEANOR H. PORTER
AUTHOR OF
"MISS BILLY—MARRIED"
(THE PAGE CO.)

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS
AUTHOR OF
"QUICK ACTION"
(D. APPLETON & CO.)

YOUNG BOOTH TARKINGTON AND SOME OF HIS OPINIONS

Continued from First Page.

might venture a bigger job—so I did. All the short stories, including 'Monsieur Beaucaire,' had been rejected by several magazines, and I had no idea that the novel would get into print. Of course I hoped it might. I'd have written it just the same if I'd been sure it wouldn't Mr. McClure took it. It was "The Gentleman From Indiana.'"

With characteristic loyalty he adds: "I had no real success until I struck Indiana subjects." He is an Indianian first of all.

He was once elected to the Legislature as a Republican, but speedily became an insurgent. Many are the tales that are told about the political campaigning into which he plunged with boyish zest. Here is one echo of those stirring days which he repeats himself with great gusto:

"Going to vote for Tarkington?"

"That actor fellow?"

"Yes, that acrobat."

"Sure, I'm goin' to vote for him. Jes' wanter see what the durn fool'l do!"

It is interesting to note that of thirteen favorite authors which Mr. Tarkington names no less than four are Frenchmen, Cherbuliez, Daudet, Balzac and Dumas. He reads more autobiography, preferably French, than anything else. Of English authors he prefers Meredith, Stevenson, James, Wells, Bennett and Hardy. Among his compatriots he admires the work of Mark Twain, Howells and Riley and confesses a special fondness for "The Boss of Little Arcady," by his friend Harry Leon Wilson.

He has literary aversions, too, aplenty and finds it hard to particularize in so wide a field. He says: "Perhaps I most hate the kind of 'literary thinking' which would hold the whole of the 'Iliad,' for instance, to be literature—the kind of literary thinking which accepts the classics as sacred and unassailable. After that I hate the sentimentalists, the intensists and the baby talk school.'

Most of his critics have advised him to stick to romanticism. But he refuses to pigeonhole or be pigeonholed and maintains that the only thing worth considering is how a book is written. He says: "I don't care to what so-called class it is considered to belong. But as a matter of fact most 'romanticism' is of very inferior workmanship nowadays. The best men don't seem interested to do it." Clowns of Beaucaire fervently hope that the last of these sentences applies to Mr. Tarkington as little as does the one which precedes it.)

There isn't much "art" in American writing just now, he thinks. "The greatest figure in prose (Mark Twain) has gone. Mr. Howells has not been publishing a great deal. Mr. Riley has been quiet; the new figures have not emerged clearly. Doubtless they will as time goes on." But nevertheless he believes that better writing is being done to-day than ever before. He expects American fiction to become in time wholly "un-'Mediterranean': Studies of our people in the language of the people."

When asked what he thinks about the promise of the new men he says: "No, I don't see any rising stars. There are probably some artists who will in time prove themselves to be artists. There are Americans who can write. Nobody is a star until he is dead—a long time dead. If he's starry too soon usually he doesn't remain so. If you press me I should have to say that I consider the most interesting phenomenon in modern literature to be its modernism. I don't know exactly what I mean by that, but it sounds as if it meant something—and it does."

It is significant that he considers Joseph Conrad "a very big man—a wonderful man. He has a wonderful vision and gives it to us in a strange way that is full of beauty."

When one mentions Conrad, one thinks of open water, so it may as well be said here that Tarkington has become an enthusiastic motorboat man. He has traded his old twenty foot dory for a thirty footer and is enjoying "mild and slow" cruising. He has had a number of automobiles at home and abroad, but they are now banished and he expects to spend most of his spare time on the water henceforth. He has never been personally active in outdoor games, though he loyally supported athletics at college and he still usually gets to Princeton in the autumn for some of the football.

The average man is always interested to know how the genius does it. Mr. Tarkington rises at 9 o'clock and is hard at it in a bathrobe at 9:30. He continues with as little food as possible until evening. And sometimes he works eighteen hours at a stretch—often till after midnight. At any rate there is work every day till the task—novel, short story or play—is done. It is a relief to know that there are vacations between these periods of feverish activity. He corroborates the word of other novelist dramatists when he says that the writing of a play is comparatively easy. But "putting it on' is another matter." And fiction, he feels, is his work.

THE COMPLEX PERSONALITY OF HERBERT GEORGE WELLS

HERBERT GEORGE WELLS—if this sketch should be started off in such a manner how many readers would at once recognize the name of one of the most talked of writers of the day? Herbert George Wells is also one of the most modest, retiring writers of the day, a fact which perhaps accounts for the fact that his name publicly has never got beyond that shrunken H. G. Wells. Indeed, Wells frequently does not sign his name at all to business letters, letting the stamped address on his stationery suffice.

Wells owes his career to a hemorrhage of the lungs, without which he would now probably be a professor of biology. He was born about forty-seven years ago at Bromley, Kent, in the south of England, and at an early age showed a desire for scientific study. He studied at the Royal College of Science, took the degree of B. Sc. at the University of London and for several years taught biology at the University Tutorial College in Red Lion Square. He wrote a text book on biology which attracted so much attention that it was even translated into Chinese.

It seemed that his life work was mapped out along definite lines when suddenly came a severe hemorrhage. He recognized its warning and knew that he must give up, at least for a time, his educational work and seek something entirely sedentary. He began writing articles for various London newspapers, and his work attracted the attention of H. B. Mariott Watson. Through Mr. Watson he made the acquaintance of W. E. Henley, who was glad to advise and help him toward a literary future. Soon he began to write books, achieving success in more varying directions than perhaps any other English writer. The reading public has not yet recovered from amazement at the latitude of his themes and methods and his complete mastery over each.

He is not, however, a creature of moods and shifting personalities; he is made up of many separate characters within himself, and it is the development of each of these that has combined to make the great Wells of to-day, a master exponent of liberalism in its broadest sense. His zest is to study and analyze all the tendencies of the time, and he reveals all of them illuminatingly, crisply and tolerantly. His present personality compactly displays all those varying, individual personalities which he first, when developing and assembling his strength, displayed one by one.

Nearly twenty years ago, in his "Select Conversations with an Uncle," he displayed an inventive talent, but the discursive little sketches were limited and affected.

This inventive talent was shown in much more perfected degree and form in his following "scientific" stories, "The First Men in the Moon," "The Time Machine," "Dr. Moreau's Island." But there was nothing as yet creative, inspirational or imaginative in them. Wells was just a clever workman, manufacturing his stories piecemeal out of the storehouse of his special and acquired knowledge. He was undeniably clever at his job, much cleverer than Jules Verne had been before him, but he as yet evinced no sign of the "divine spark," the real creative gift which is based on imagination.

The first suggestion of this quality came with his "The Wonderful Visit"; and later, developing, with his "The Food of the Gods." Then in "Kipps" he showed that he could create a real, living, throbbing segment of life, genuine and significant and at the same time gentle as though viewed by a tolerant, understanding deity.

"Tono-Bungay" and "The New Machiavelli" showed a powerful mentality in complete control of itself and of its creation, pushing forward every sort of problem, event, tangle and illusion that the age has produced. Wells with his wide knowledge, with his developed intellect, with his tolerant understanding, had climbed to a high place and looked understandingly down upon a frail world. While "The New Machiavelli" is most strikingly a political consideration of present day England and while "Tono-Bungay" prominently sends shafts of light on the methods of modern business, both of these books are great and significant and will live because of the absolute sincerity and truth with which they reveal every phase of the life they portray.

Mr. Wells has two new books for this season, "The World Set Free," a novel embodying all his characteristic assets, and "Social Forces in Europe and America," a volume which is exactly what its title implies.

A writer for the *Book News Monthly* who has recently had the privilege of visiting Wells in his home describes his personal appearance and his home. We are glad to quote:

Wells is a little man. He is thin and so is his hair; his eyes are unimpressive and his mustache is straggly. No one failing to know him would guess the presence of England's greatest writer. * * * His eyes are brown and kindly and set deeply beneath a forehead across which unruly strands of reddish brown hair persist in straying.

In its white gables and awnings in strong contrast to the century old ivy stands the rectory, a low, rambling house built in the days when George I. was King. And there too, lying at full length upon the grass in the midst of a very chaos of toy engines, forts and leaden soldiers, was Mr. Wells, no whit less interested than were his two sons, boys of some 10 and 11 years, who played beside him.

Leaving the boys to their game Mr. Wells took me to the house and together we entered the low, cool room that is his study. Here by the open window stood his desk and the breeze fluttered the leaves of a manuscript upon which he had been working earlier in the day. Around the walls were well stocked bookcases with here and there a simply framed picture.

During a short walk he showed me the various things of interest about the place. A herd of gentle deer, quietly grazing beyond a boundary fence, looked up in sudden alarm at our approach. Just back of the rectory, but sheltered from view by a screen of elms, is the pond upon which Mr. Wells and his sons venture throughout long summer afternoons, their argosy a venerable punt.

Later Mr. Wells discussed his literary work. He said that "Mr Polly" was one of his favorites, though in England it had never been successful enough to soar beyond a two shilling edition.

He partially assented that much of his work is autobiographical:

"Every novel is to some degree autobiographical, inasmuch as the author consciously or unconsciously puts into it more or less of himself. In regard to my own work, much of the early portions of 'Tono-Bungay' and of 'The New Machiavelli' may be said to be the result of my own experience. I am not a university man, nor for the work in which I have engaged do I feel it to be a disadvantage. Oxford and Cambridge are institutions of the past. We need more of the spirit of to-day."

America he feels to be the true expression of this new phase. Not perhaps the America of to-day, but the America of the future. "I must revisit the United States," he said between puffs at his brier. "Even since my last trip conditions have changed beyond belief. New forces are at work. You have space and you are still young. You have hope."

He is an outdoors man, fond of motoring and cricket and keenly interested in aviation, as is shown in his books. "The War in the Air," "The First Men in the Moon" and "The Sleeper Awakes" all centre about the conquest of the air, while aviation is included in "The New Machiavelli," "Tono-Bungay" and "Marriage." Wells is a close friend of Dunne, inventor of the Dunne biplane, and says that he feels sure of the ultimate success of the biplane.

COMMENTS ON WOMEN IN POPULAR NOVEL.

By CYRIL HARCOURT.

WOMEN like a man who understands their clothes. They may dress for each other—and it is quite a fallacy to suppose that they dress for men, still they do like a man who has a feminine touch or two about him. "A man who has a medal with three clasps and understands the cut of a skirt is God's last word in men."

The very nicest women may fail terribly with neckties, and they may know no more of trousers beyond the fact that they are customary. In the matter of hosiery I found her to be sound. When she rejected the socks that were "selling" I knew her for a woman in a thousand. "The things that are 'selling' are the things one doesn't buy," she remarked to the man who was serving me, and I very nearly cheered. There are women in existence, and nice women too, who would have made me buy socks that looked like summer blouses.

"It is a terrible thing for any young girl to be driven to the altar in a hired carriage, when she might be married just as well by jumping over a stick if only it were customary. Personally I would rather be kissed three times under a star: once for faith, once for hope, once for charity: Oh! and once for luck. That makes it four." "And so you should be," I remarked, "if it wasn't for the neighbors. But they expect confetti and 'The Voice That Breathed O'er Croydon' before they call and leave their cards."

—*From "The World's Daughter."*